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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

*The Soviet Leadership on the Eve
of the 24th Congress of the CPSU*

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No 678

**19 March 1971
No. 0362/71A**

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THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP ON THE EVE OF THE 24TH CONGRESS OF THE CPSU

The 24th Soviet party congress will convene on 30 March, one year past the statutory time limit and five years after the last congress. As the party's most authoritative forum, the congress will endorse policy guidelines and realign the top political hierarchy to fit changes in power relations that have taken place since the last session.

As the meeting approaches, there have been signs of fierce pulling and hauling among opposing factions within the party to influence the general tone and direction of the congress. To some extent this involves bureaucratic competition among important interest groups—regional as well as central—for more money and greater power. But the main cleavage is between those who would like to see the congress endorse an acceleration of the present conservative drift in Soviet policies and those who would have it mark a return to a more flexible and innovative approach. The leadership appears to be fairly evenly divided between moderates and conservatives, and there is still no clear evidence as to what direction the congress will take. There will certainly be no major shift in policy unless there is a major shake-up in the leadership, and that does not appear to be in the offing.

General Secretary Brezhnev, the most powerful figure in the leadership and spokesman for the generally middle-of-the-road faction, has markedly enhanced his authority since the last congress. It would be surprising if some of his followers did not improve their positions at this session. But existing checks and balances still appear to be strong enough to safeguard the system of collective decision-making and to prevent Brezhnev from establishing the kind of domination enjoyed by Stalin and to a lesser extent by Khrushchev.

It has indeed appeared difficult for the leadership to make any changes in its ranks. There have been no alterations in the composition of the eleven-man politburo since the last congress, although several members at the very least seem due for retirement. This meeting will therefore determine whether such changes will be made on a timely basis or whether immobility will persist.

Functions of the Congress

According to party texts, the congress is the "indisputable authority of party power," the formal apex of the party's hierarchical organiza-

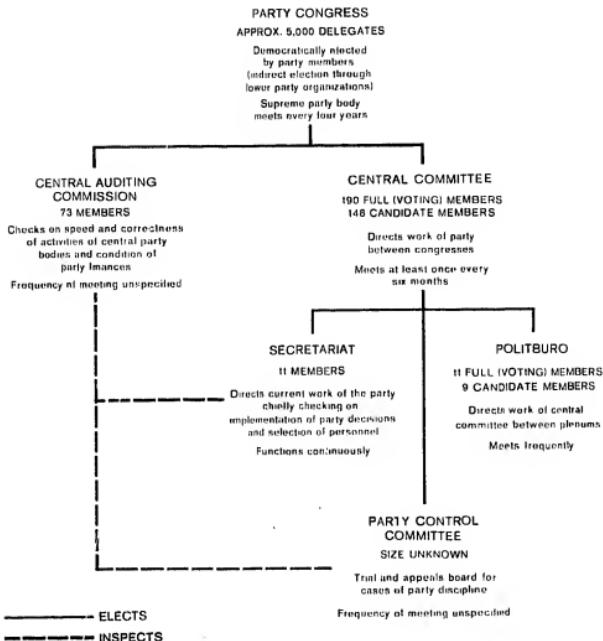
tion. According to the script, it is composed of delegates elected in a democratic manner at regional convocations by delegates who in turn have been elected at district meetings. In practice, however, the delegates are carefully selected in advance by Moscow.

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STRUCTURE OF TOP SOVIET PARTY BODIES (on Eve of 24th Party Congress)



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In the early years party congresses participated actively in policy making, but under Stalin they degenerated into a rubber stamp forum designed to give the leadership a semblance of democratic legitimacy and to propagate the regime's policies. Although congresses have been convened with greater frequency and regularity in recent years, their role and operations have not essentially changed.

The convocation of a party congress is, nevertheless, an event of great importance in Soviet political life. It is the occasion for reviewing party activities and for authoritatively defining basic policies. It is also a primary reference point in party annals and historiography. Pronouncements of the 23rd party congress are frequently cited as basic guidelines, and even those held during the Khrushchev era are occasionally mentioned.

The convening of a congress also helps to bring into the open the crosscurrents of political and policy disagreements within the leadership. Furthermore, it forces a review of the membership of the ruling bodies—the politburo, the secretariat and the central committee—and thus is a time when individual leaders seek to place their followers in positions of influence.

As general secretary of the central committee, Brezhnev will deliver the "accountability report," which, in theory, is an accounting to the party's highest body of the activities of the central committee since the preceding congress. This keynote address reviews developments in the interval, defines the current situation, and outlines a program for the future. It is usually divided into three major sections—the international situation, domestic affairs, and the state of the party—and is followed by discussion.

If there are any "dramatic" moments at the congress, they are most likely to occur in Brezhnev's speech itself or during subsequent discussion of it. Kosygin's report on the five-year plan, the only other significant report scheduled, seems likely to be an exposition of the draft directives

of the 1971-1975 plan published in the Soviet press in mid-February.

The session, which is expected to last more than a week, will close with the election of a new central committee that in turn will meet to elect the other ruling bodies, the politburo and the secretariat. In both cases decisions concerning membership will already have been made. The congress will be attended by representatives of foreign Communist and some left-wing parties. The foreign representatives will present greetings from the various "fraternal parties" but will not participate in the deliberations.

Conflicting Policy Directions

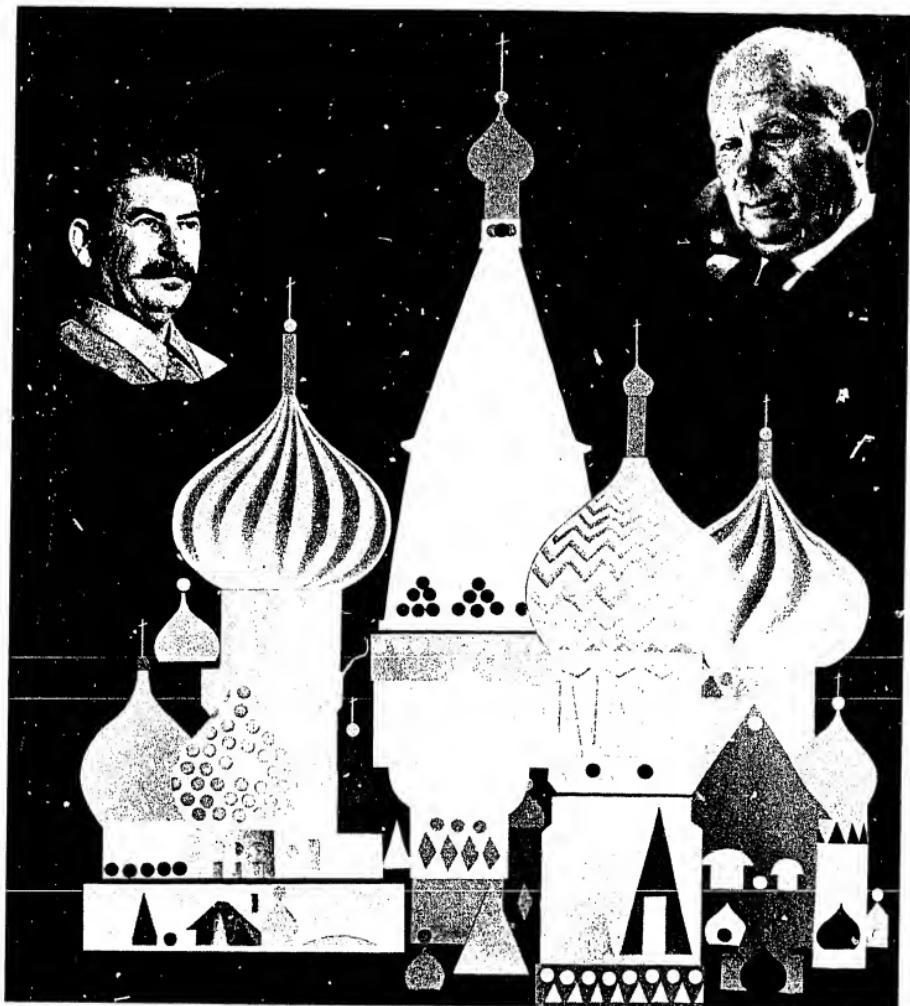
The collective leadership that succeeded Khrushchev has proved to have considerable political staying power. The group has avoided any open, destructive struggle for power, but it has by no means been free of internal disagreements. As the congress approaches, jockeying to influence its tone and direction has become apparent. Essentially the struggle involves the question of how far Soviet policy should move away from Khrushchev—symbolizing change—and back toward Stalin—symbolizing the old way of doing things.

At one extreme of the Soviet political spectrum are those who would like to return to tough Stalinist policies in domestic and foreign affairs. They are not represented in the politburo, although their voices may well be heard in the Kremlin. They consider Khrushchev's de-Stalinization drive a grave mistake that has led to the erosion of Soviet power in the Communist world and to unrest at home. They favor stern measures against domestic dissident elements and distrust any innovations that might tend to weaken party and government controls. They are obsessed with the dangers of ideological subversion from the West and doubt the wisdom of closer relations with capitalist countries, particularly if it entails more than minor concessions on the Soviet side. They put much stock in the importance of reconciliation with the Communist Chinese and seem

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to have been able to convince themselves that this is simply a matter of removing revisionist elements from Soviet political life.

At the other extreme are those who believe that, without some basic economic reforms and a further democratization of political and social institutions, it will not be possible to get the country moving and to solve its economic ills. Members of this persuasion believe that if the Soviet Union is to make rapid progress in modernizing its economy, it will have to accelerate the use of Western technology. They favor a flexible, essentially nationalistic, foreign policy. Moreover, they tend to see Communist China, rather than the West, as the greatest potential threat to the Soviet Union, not only from a military point of view, but because Chinese arguments play into the hands of the neo-Stalinists at home.

The range of views represented at the top policy-making level does not encompass these extremes, and certainly no one leader wholly embraces either of these programs. The two extremes do, however, help to define the limits within which policy debates take place and to identify the ingredients that go into the "mix" of Soviet policy.

There is a fairly even balance in the leadership between conservative and moderately liberal interests, but it is evident from the direction that Soviet policy has taken since Khrushchev's ouster that the conservatives have generally come out ahead in the argument. They are now clearly pushing their advantage in hopes of achieving some major gain at the congress, possibly even the further rehabilitation of Stalin. Their capability

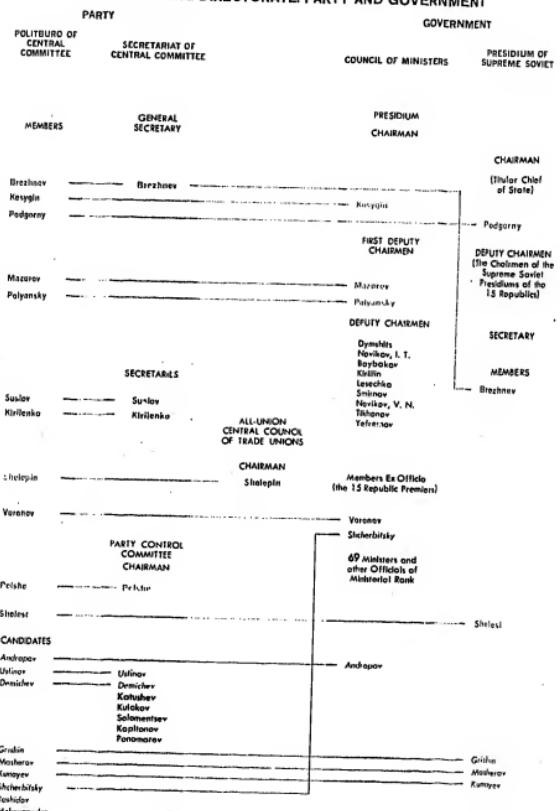


Politburo Lineup
 Front row (left to right)—Voronov, Suslov, Podgorny, Kosygin, Brezhnev
 Back row—Pelshe, Shelepin, Mazurov, Kirilenko, Polyansky
 (the empty chair belongs to Shelest)

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to do so without a major change in the composition of the politburo is problematical. Such a step would have a severely inhibiting impact on all domestic policy innovations and an adverse effect on the political fortunes of those in the leadership who have been associated with a push for change.

Shifting Political Alignments

The alignment within the politburo and even the position of some of the individual members have changed fairly dramatically in the five years since the last party congress. General Secretary Brezhnev, as "chairman of the board" and its most powerful member, still hews to the middle ground, but this ground has gradually shifted toward the conservative end of the political spectrum. Those in the leadership who appear to make up the hard core of his political support—the "Ukrainian group"—have increasingly come to be identified with a tough line on domestic and foreign policy matters. The independent members of the 11-man politburo, including both past and present rivals and critics of Brezhnev, now seem to have landed in the moderate sector.

On the eve of the 23rd party congress, held in 1966, the leadership was still united in its resolve to back off from many policies associated with Khrushchev, particularly his drive against Stalinism. The leadership had not given up hope that, with Khrushchev out of the way and with the taking of a decision to stop all criticism of Stalin, the major problems in relations with Communist China might be ironed out without further ideological concessions. The two leaders who had been closest to Khrushchev and who had apparently disagreed with this line on Stalin—Mikoyan and Podgorny—had already been moved to positions of lesser importance. Furthermore, the new leadership's self-styled, "business-like" approach to economic problems embodied in the agricultural and economic programs of 1965 was still too new to come under fire. Even so, three groups could be discerned in the politburo.

Premier Kosygin, with his overriding interest in improving the performance of the economy

and his general willingness to deal with the West on a businesslike basis, was the leading figure of the moderate faction. He had a very influential voice in policy-making and had gained a relatively free hand in the administration of the economy. A gentlemen's agreement had been reached after Khrushchev's ouster that the top party and government posts would not be held by one man and, although Kosygin has never seemed personally ambitious, this agreement on separation of powers made him a natural counterweight to Brezhnev.

At the other end of the spectrum were two conservative groups—an ideologically motivated one headed by veteran party secretary Suslov and a neo-Stalinist wing led by Shelepin. The Shelepin group favored a return to the use of fiat, as in the Stalin era, in directing the economy, but without the old reliance on terror and on the personality cult. Brezhnev was seen by many observers at that time as a weak leader—a compromise candidate upon whom all factions could agree.

Shelepin's association with the neo-Stalinist wing seems to have been more politically than ideologically motivated. He has always been portrayed [redacted] as dynamic, driving, and impatient with inefficiency, but above all ambitious for power. In the period following Khrushchev's ouster he apparently tried to use the issue of Stalin as a political device to weaken Kosygin's influence and to unseat Brezhnev. In any event, he seems to have underestimated Brezhnev's political skills, as others have.

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Brezhnev bested Shelepin by an age-old tactic—he moved to protect himself against political attack from the conservative wing by adopting Shelepin's position on a number of issues, while at the same time maneuvering to oust Shelepin's supporters from positions of power on charges of factionalism. Brezhnev was assisted in this by the general fear among the other politburo members of Shelepin's ambition and by their suspicion that his commitment to the principle of collectivity was not strong. As a result, at the 23rd congress

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Shelepin was stripped of his key responsibilities on the party secretariat, and one of Brezhnev's closest associates—Kirilenko—was brought into the organization.

While Shelepin's base of support was being steadily chipped away, he continued to be identified as head of the neo-Stalinist wing. There were even reports that, at the nadir of relations with Communist China in early 1967, Shelepin was still criticizing senior members of the politburo for failing to achieve an accommodation with their "fraternal" ex-ally.

The turning point apparently came at the central committee plenum following the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when the ranking members of the politburo put down a challenge by Shelepin's ally—Nikolay Yegorychev, then head of the Moscow party organization—and Shelepin himself was transferred to the relatively powerless post of head of the trade union organization.

Since then there have been indications that Shelepin has gradually moderated his views. With his former power base eroded and Brezhnev and his supporters solidly holding down the conservative position, Shelepin was much in need of a new constituency and new issues.



Shelepin—A New Man?

[redacted] It is not clear that Shelepin has formulated any coherent domestic program, or that he has been won over to the merits of economic reform, but he no longer seems to be at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Kosygin.

Party secretary Suslov also seems to have moderated his views, becoming more flexible and less doctrinaire. Shelepin's transformation appears to have been the result of political factors, but Suslov's change of heart may have been the result of his growing concern over the threat from Peking and his constant exposure to diverse and frequently revisionist opinions within Western Communist parties. The emergence of Suslov and Shelepin as members of the more progressive wing of the party was evident during the Czechoslovak crisis. In the reporting on the divided counsels in the Soviet leadership at that time, there was almost total agreement that Kosygin, Suslov, and Shelepin opposed the military invasion.

Moreover, Suslov still stands as the only Soviet leader since 1964 to criticize Stalin publicly for a political mistake. In a speech in March 1969, he accused him of having erroneously branded the social democrats as the main enemy in the 1920s and 1930s, rather than Hitler's Nazism. Suslov's initiative thus laid the theoretical groundwork for an overture to West Germany that became possible after Brandt's election in late 1969 and ultimately led to the treaty signed with West Germany in August 1970.

It is probably no coincidence that Suslov's peace offering to Western social democrats came only a few weeks after the Sino-Soviet border clash on the Amur River island of Damansky. Suslov, by failing to identify the West as the main enemy, seemed to be trying to mute ideological disagreements in that quarter so as to permit the Soviet Union to concentrate on the "main danger" from the East.

Shelest Assumes the Mantle of the Conservative Party

With Shelepin and Suslov playing leapfrog in the political arena, the mantle of leadership of the

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conservative faction that once belonged to Shelepin now seems to be worn by Ukrainian party boss Shelest.



Shelest questions peaceful coexistence with the West

[the recent publicity given the discovery of "new" evidence of another wartime Nazi atrocity in the Ukraine looks very much like an attempt to stir up sentiment against the Soviet - West German treaty.

On domestic affairs, however, Shelest hardly fits the conventional image of a Soviet conservative. His views on matters inside the Soviet Union stand in striking contrast with those, for example, of Polyansky, who is a strong advocate of centralized management and takes a tough line toward intellectual ferment. Shelest has consistently protected a revival of Ukrainian nationalism in literary and cultural life and has pushed for greater authority and independence of action for local officials. In fact, his reactionary stand on Soviet relations with the West may be inspired, in part, by the need to cover for his political vulnerabilities on the domestic front. Shelest has clearly had a strong influence on Brezhnev, but their relationship is ambiguous. There are signs that Shelest

aspires to a higher post in Moscow, and he may not have been among Brezhnev's supporters in recent political struggles in the leadership.

Tension in the Kremlin

An extended period of tension in the leadership was precipitated in the early months of 1970 when the final figures on the 1969 plan fulfillment showed a disappointingly poor economic performance, which resulted in disagreement over the draft five-year plan for 1971-75 up for preliminary review at that time.

As the year wore on, the thorny issue of resource allocations—specifically the question of agriculture's share of the investment pie in the draft five-year plan—spilled over into public view in an argument between Polyansky, the regime's leading agricultural administrator and a close

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supporter of Brezhnev, and Voronov, the premier of the Russian Republic. If not actually aligned with other critics of Brezhnev's leadership, Voronov at least had their sympathy. He may even have had Kosygin's blessing for his assault on the agriculture lobby, for the Soviet premier had seemed concerned previously about the high cost of investment in agriculture.

Statements by the two antagonists appeared within days of each other at the end of March and had every appearance of a bitter personal exchange. Polyansky forcefully stressed the importance of giving priority attention to the needs of agriculture in the draft five-year plan, leaving the impression that he was quite unhappy with the share allotted to agriculture in the draft version then under discussion. He insisted that it was the lack of machinery that had made agriculture inefficient, an anticipated retort to Voronov's speech. Voronov, for his part, was strongly critical of the failure of the farms to provide sufficient food for the cities. He said nothing about the need for more money and machinery, implying instead that the answer lay in better use of existing resources. This, incidentally, was a theme that had been frequently sounded by Shelepin.

Furthermore, Voronov sponsored his own proposal for organizing farm labor at a number of meetings during March, and it was clear that he viewed it, if not as an alternative to Polyansky's call for higher investment in agriculture, at least as a necessary corollary.

By mid-April, Brezhnev had clearly regained the initiative. It is not entirely clear how he managed to shake off his critics. His renewed vitality may indeed have been due to the fact that two of his reported challengers, Shelepin and Suslov, were ill during the crucial period of March and early April.

Apparently as one of his earliest steps, Brezhnev decided to back Polyansky in his demand for higher investment in agriculture. The occurrence of widespread meat shortages in the winter of 1969-70 undoubtedly had something to do with his decision, but basically it seems to have been a political move—a reflection of his renewed strength and of the weakening of the opposition.

Brezhnev apparently sold the politburo on agriculture's need for more funds in late May. He then made an unusual foray into the Council of Ministers, apparently to inform them that the plan would have to be revised to allow for a bigger share for agriculture than previously agreed upon. And in July, he got the central committee's approval for these revisions and their incorporation in the draft five-year plan.

Brezhnev's offensive seems to have rocked the collective ship in another direction. His blatant intervention in the planning process in May undercut Kosygin's authority and may at least have ruffled the feathers of some other leaders. Rumors of Kosygin's impending retirement that had started in April reached flood proportions. If Kosygin were to leave, the obvious choice for his replacement would lie between his two first deputies—Polyansky and Mazurov. Polyansky, with his agricultural victory under his belt, looked like an increasingly dangerous competitor. Whatever Kosygin's intentions, there does seem to have been an attempt to block Polyansky's chances of taking over his job. This may well have been one of the motivations in Voronov's attack on the agricultural lobby earlier in the spring. In any event, Kosygin did not step down at the Supreme Soviet session in July, and in fact, his entire government was reconfirmed.

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Kosygin (center) and his two deputies, Mazurov and Polyansky

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Kosygin scheduled as the main reporters. And, although there was to be further confusion in working out the draft five-year plan even after the rough treatment it had received earlier, the main decisions concerning the congress probably had been made.

The Business of the Congress

The congress will be focused primarily on domestic problems and is unlikely to serve as a forum for any dramatic initiatives in the foreign policy field. Its over-all tone and mood are bound, however, to affect the way specific foreign policy issues are treated by individual speakers and, indirectly, to affect future Soviet initiatives in the international arena.

With the confirmation of Kosygin as premier, the period of crisis seemed to have passed, and collective leadership returned to an even keel. At the same time, the 24th party congress was finally set for March 1971, with Brezhnev and

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Speakers at the party congress will probably adopt self-congratulatory and fairly predictable language regarding Soviet policy in most areas of the world. Advances by the Soviets in the Mediterranean area will be heralded if balanced by a restatement of their desire for a political settlement. Moscow will evince satisfaction at the shift from fighting to talking with China, but will couple this with routine condemnations of "Maoism." The Soviet treaty with West Germany will come in for particular praise.

Although it is unlikely that anything will be said at the congress that would close the door to continued US-Soviet negotiations on various issues, relations with the US will probably be made to appear particularly gloomy in contrast with other areas of foreign relations, which will be viewed optimistically. Congress speakers will probably see no improvement in these relations in 1971 and will flay the US for its actions in Indochina and for its continuing arms build-up.

Economic Matters

By all accounts, the congress will concentrate on economic matters. Although 1970, the last year of the current five-year plan, was generally a good year for Soviet industry and agriculture, the growth rate of the Soviet economy has continued to disappoint the leadership, and the technological gap between the East and West has not narrowed. The necessity of coming up with a new five-year plan on the basis of these results has presented the leadership with some hard decisions and has generated intense debate over the past year.

The five-year plan is a crucial blueprint for future Soviet economic development. Though subject to change, it nevertheless sets the goals of the regime and ties up investment funds and labor for lengthy periods. The formulation of plans always generates intensive infighting by individual leaders to protect vested interests in the allocations of scarce resources.

After a long delay and numerous revisions, draft directives were published in mid-February. Essentially these directives appear to be a continuation of the past plan and do not reflect any major shifts of allocations from one sector to another. The absence of some crucial figures and the unorthodox and hurried way the draft was issued, however, suggest that some aspects of the plan may still have been undecided at the time of its publication. The murkiest area seems to be the gap between the lofty promises in the preamble of priority attention to consumer goods and the figures in small print. The projected growth of consumer goods output at a faster rate than producer goods is unprecedented in a five-year plan, but the few statistics given suggest a somewhat lower rate of increase in consumer welfare as compared with 1966/70.

Management Debates

Questions of administrative reform have been even more intractable and politically sensitive for the leadership than the debate over allocations. Soviet economic growth has been seriously impeded by an outmoded administrative structure and a system of management that is not sufficiently flexible for running a modern economy and promoting technological progress.

The basic problem confronting the Kremlin is how to get better returns on capital investments and labor resources in industry and agriculture. The leaders have been hampered in their search for new methods, not only by bureaucratic infighting and political rivalries, but by their fear that reforms could lead to a loss of the party's monopoly of power. Events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, where pressure from liberal elements for economic reform quickly led to a dissolution of party control, forcefully brought home to the Soviet leaders the dangers of such reform. On the other hand, more recent events in Poland point up with equal vigor the dangers in failure to get the economy moving. In Poland it was protests by the vaunted working class over food shortages and

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the high cost of living that forced changes in the political hierarchy. Thus Soviet leaders are, in a way, damned if they do and damned if they don't. Certainly, the verbiage devoted this winter to future production of consumer goods suggests that the Kremlin has been trying to read the "lesson" of the December strikes in Poland, but it is by no means clear that the leaders agree on what that "lesson" is.

It is a measure of the frustration of the leadership in this dilemma that the proposals for "reorganization" of the economy recently under discussion are extraordinarily tame in comparison with measures discussed in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, even these wan Soviet gestures of "experiment" manage to generate partisan debate in the Kremlin and suggest the regional political pressures to which the politburo is subject, in addition to the more conventional institutional ones.

Fate of the 1965 Economic Reform

The 1965 economic reform was only half of a curiously complex legislative package that also involved the dissolution of Khrushchev's territorial economic administrations (sovarkhozes) and the re-establishment of central ministries. The package was the product of an unlikely alliance between the central government bureaucracy and liberal economists. It aimed at stimulating the economy by giving individual enterprises greater operational freedom and by shifting from administrative methods to greater reliance on economic levers and material incentives for the workers.

Some of the more radical aspects of the original scheme were never implemented—they fell victim to the growing caution and conservatism of the leadership and to the fears aroused by the Czechoslovak experiments. Reform-minded elements within the leadership were put on the defensive after the invasion, and they have never regained their forward thrust.

The reform has now been introduced in most of the larger Soviet enterprises, but the

results have been disappointing in terms of production figures and costs. High-level support for the principles of the reform has seriously eroded. Few members of the politburo gave more than a passing nod to the subject in their election speeches last June. Premier Kosygin, who was most responsible for the adoption of the reform, was the only one to discuss it at any length. Although he defended it vigorously for what it had already accomplished, he said nothing about carrying it any further. An article in the January issue of the party's leading theoretical journal, *Kommunist*, contained an unusually warm defense of the 1965 principles, however, suggesting at least that the issue is not yet dead.

Plans in Political Platforms

As hopes for this reform have dwindled, Soviet politicians have squabbled about a number of other proposals in economic management. These schemes are not of far-reaching economic significance, but they do reflect a certain measure of innovative spirit, as well as the historical proclivity of Soviet leaders to believe that some rearrangement of the administrative structure can solve basic economic difficulties. Perhaps more important, these proposals are usually designed to favor special bureaucratic or regional interests, and they therefore become a basis of political competition. Thus the way in which they are treated at the congress will provide clues as to the political fortunes of their promoters in the leadership.

One scheme that has been advanced as a way of streamlining the economy is the creation of regional production associations. The concept essentially involves the grouping for planning and management purposes of enterprises in a given geographic area that manufacture similar products or use similar technology. Advocates of the scheme promise increased efficiency through specialization as well as savings in manpower and money. Regional officials have promoted it as a way of recapturing the power lost to Moscow when Khrushchev's decentralization scheme was abandoned. Associations were promoted in

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Mazurov (left), an advocate of associations and integrated planning

Leningrad in the early 1960s, and the Leningraders fought unsuccessfully to get the concept firmly established in the 1965 legislative package. Former Leningrad party boss Tolstikov, now ambassador to Communist China, was one of the strongest advocates of the associations. His successor in Leningrad, Romanov, has continued this support. Experiments with associations also have a long history in the Ukraine and presumably have the backing of Ukrainian party boss Shelest. The idea has also caught on strongly in Belarusia and the Baltic, and has been publicly endorsed by former Belarusian party boss Mazurov, who now serves as one of Kosygin's first deputies.

The main opposition to production associations has come from the central ministries, which could lose considerable authority and control. Recent efforts to create all-union, rather than territorial-based associations, even though the former have a valid economic rationale, also smack of an attempt by the central bureaucracy to turn the scheme to its own advantage. Opposition has also come from enterprise managers who, in joining an association, could lose some of their recently acquired operational freedom. Kosygin's equivocal comments on the subject suggest that he sees little virtue in the idea.

Agricultural Matters

The present leaders have made considerable progress in improving farming conditions by increasing the flow of money, machinery and fertilizers. The cost of agricultural production is exceedingly high, however, and this has generated debate and pressure for reform.

The administrative system for agriculture clearly needs improving. Part of the reason for the disappointing return on investment is the lack of coordination in the planning and performance of the various branches associated with agriculture. As a result the farms do not receive the kind of machinery they need, and crops rot in the fields for want of processing facilities while food queues grow longer in the cities. Persistent disagreement, rivalries, and jurisdictional disputes between various regional and central agricultural interest groups, however, have hindered the finding of solutions. The search for answers is complicated by the existence of two types of farms, i.e., state-run farms and the nominally peasant-managed cooperatives (*kolkhozes*), which create problems in working out a new form of administration. As in the case of the industrial sector, programs approved at the 23rd party congress have since been watered down, and consensus has yet to be reached on new directions.

One of the schemes advanced and ultimately defeated was the concept of collective farm unions. At the 23rd party congress Brezhnev endorsed a proposal, put forward by several regional party organizations, to establish a hierarchy of elected unions to look after the interests of the collective farms. The proposal was backed by Shelest's Ukrainian party organization and by leaders of other republics where collective farms considerably outnumber state farms. Brezhnev presumably sponsored the proposal at the congress because of his political ties with the Ukrainian leaders, but he may also have seen an opportunity to advance the authority of the party at

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the expense of the central state bureaucracy. The Ministry of Agriculture stood to lose considerable authority if the scheme was approved, and the minister made no bones about his opposition. Polyansky, the regime's top agricultural administrator, evidently also sided with the ministry.



Polansky—Spokesman for agricultural bureaucracy

Despite the decentralization feature of the proposal that should have appealed to regional leaders, there was considerable opposition to the idea from areas such as Belorussia and Estonia, where the leaders apparently felt that a kolkhoz union would conflict with a local interest in integrated regional planning. It fell to the outspoken Estonian party boss, Kebin, to present publicly the arguments against the scheme. The combined weight of these republic leaders and central ministries smothered the proposal at the Collective Farm Congress in the fall of 1969.

Agricultural Reorganization Schemes

The issues of agricultural organization are hardly significant enough to be the focus of a disruptive dispute. If they surface in disputes at the congress they will most likely be symptomatic of deeper divisions within the leadership.

The problem of how to bring some order into relations among farms and associated state

enterprises still remains, and out of the wreckage of the collective farm union scheme came now bursts of interest in the concept of agro-industrial complexes. This proposal involves the grouping together of both farms and enterprises within a given region to produce, process, and market one or several related products. The scheme has found favor with the Belorussians and Balts, whose leaders may hope that the regional basis for planning and management will lead to some decentralization of power by Moscow. In a sense the agro-industrial complex is the logical companion to industrial associations.

Several recent articles in the Soviet press have proposed that planning and administration at the national level should be accomplished on the basis of the agro-industrial concept, rather than by using the present narrow branch approach. The authoritative tone of the articles suggests that they had high-level support. It is tempting to see Deputy Premier Polyansky's hand in this. As things now stand, he is responsible for agricultural production but he has no direct authority over the industries that produce the machinery and material for agricultural production or over the industries that process agricultural products. The creation of an agro-industrial sector would give Polyansky the opportunity to extend his "empire" significantly.

On the other hand, the need to move from branch planning to integrated planning is a theme sounded by First Deputy Premier Mazurov and favored by his fellow Belorussians. A possible clue that he may be involved in the initiative was the insistence in one of the articles on the subject of agro-industrial complexes that the consumer industry should have the leading role; the consumer sector comes under Mazurov's purview.

The "Link"

Another approach attacks the problem of lagging agricultural production at the lowest level—the organization of labor and the payment of wages on the farms. This is a proposal for the

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establishment of small-farm production subdivisions called "links." A number of kinds of "links" are being widely experimented with, but the basic form is one in which a section of the farm and the machinery necessary to farm it are assigned to a small group of farmers for an extended period of time. Unlike the usual farm brigade paid on a piece-work basis, the members of the "link" are responsible for the full cycle of work, from sowing to harvest. Their wages are then tied to the size of the harvest.

The proposal has been vigorously pushed by Voronov, premier of the Russian Republic. He is the only member of the politburo who has spoken out on the subject. The "link" has been widely introduced into the Russian Republic and in Belorussia, but there are important pockets of opposition. The Shelest-led Ukrainians are strongly opposed to the idea, and the USSR minister of agriculture—probably representing Polyansky's views—has also strongly resisted it.

There is also an obvious personal-political aspect to the debate. Voronov is a long-time rival of Polyansky and a frequent critic of the agriculture lobby. He has used the issue of the "link" as a political device to embarrass the agricultural administrators and through them Polyansky, and to drive home the need for more reform and less money in agriculture.

Socialist Democracy

Voronov's campaign for "links" seems to be one aspect of a larger but less clearly articulated movement to develop socialist democracy, specifically by encouraging greater worker participation



Voronov, critic of agricultural lobby

in management. In a sense, this push for worker participation, while falling far short of anything like the Yugoslav experiment, seems to be aimed at giving a new emphasis or direction to the economic reform to overcome criticism that it merely encourages management and workers to "chase after rubles." Suslov and Shelepin have been noticeably cool in their public treatment of economic reform, and there are hints that they, as well as politburo member Pelshe, are all to one extent or another behind the new emphasis on socialist democracy. Pelshe, who is believed to be a close associate of Suslov, discussed the subject at length in a speech in Milan last fall, and several calls for greater worker participation have appeared in *Trud*, the official newspaper of Shelepin's trade union organization.

In two recent speeches Suslov also has treated socialist democracy and the need to involve workers in management affairs at some length. Characteristically he casts the issue in a larger ideological framework. There are, for example, hints that he is attempting to shape his views into a program that could be represented as a new advance in the building of Communism—possibly a move "forward" from the present stage of building its material and technical base to one emphasizing equal concern with building its social base.

Suslov has strongly endorsed a more important role for the hierarchy of Soviets as a counterweight to the state apparatus. It is evident that he views the Soviets with the party at their elbow—as vehicles to temper the state administration's overriding concern with production matters and as a vehicle for increasing citizen involvement in communal affairs. A party decree published in



Suslov warms up

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mid-March outlining measures to increase the authority of local Soviets suggests that this will be a significant theme at the congress.

Outlook

The 1970 tension in the leadership was apparently resolved, or at least brought under control, without ripping the collective leadership apart. Although Sholepin and Voronov have clearly lost ground politically, they remain on the politburo. The sharp rivalries and personal animosities that surfaced during 1970, however, suggest that there has been some hardening of differences within the collective. Whereas in the past there was evidence of considerable fluidity from issue to issue and from one moment to another, this no longer seems to be the case, to the same degree. This could make Brezhnev's position as

the "chairman of the board" more difficult in the future.

It has also become clearer that it is now Suslov, rather than Kosygin, who is the main counterweight to Brezhnev and the man in the leadership to whom the moderates turn. This is partly because Kosygin's authority has diminished in the years since the last congress as a result of the failure of his economic reform to live up to its original promise and also because of Brezhnev's repeated incursions into his field. Furthermore, Kosygin has taken a less independent stand on policy issues in recent years, and his views seem more in harmony with Brezhnev's now than in the past.

Suslov's rumored willingness to take the lead in criticizing Polyansky last July is illustrative of



The "Seniors"
Left to right (front) Podgorny, Brezhnev, Kosygin, Suslov

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his new role. His unusual participation in November at a meeting on the work of rural Soviets sponsored by Voronov, served, whether intentionally or not, to give a much-needed lift to the latter's sagging political fortunes. Suslov is, nevertheless, a frail reed.

Over the years Brezhnev has been able successfully to play one faction off against another and has been the chief beneficiary of the Kremlin's delicate balance of power. He has emerged from last year's political low in a far stronger position than before. The promotional campaign in the Soviet press in his behalf in recent months and his forceful assumption of the trappings and substance of authority are clear signs that he is determined to put himself in the strongest position possible as the congress approaches.

Although there is little reason to doubt that he will remain the dominant figure in the leadership, existing checks and balances still appear strong enough to guard the system of collective decision-making and to prevent him from completely dominating the leadership as Khrushchev did. Collectivity rests on a number of organizational and procedural safeguards that were informally agreed upon by Khrushchev's successors and have become increasingly institutionalized with the passage of time.

These safeguards include not only the decision to keep the two top posts in different hands—certainly one of the main obstacles to the re-emergence of one-man rule—but also an apparent agreement to limit political patronage by denying any one leader control over key party and government posts at all levels. This has led to the development of a more bureaucratic approach to the assignment of personnel, one rather akin to a civil service system. As a result, Brezhnev has been able to bring about the removal of various supporters of Shelepin and of other rivals, but he has clearly not had a free hand in selecting their

successors. Thus preliminary information on the new central committee to be elected at the congress suggests that it will include a somewhat larger number of Brezhnev's associates than before but not an overwhelming majority.

The system of collectivity is also protected to a certain extent by an elaborate system of mutual checks that prevent any one institution from dominating the policy-making process, or one individual from establishing a foothold in more than one institution. This inhibits a member of one faction from moving against his rivals or his boss. Thus the membership on the eleven-man politburo is evenly distributed among the leading institutions; for instance, there are three members from the party secretariat and three members from the council of ministers. A careful effort has been made to avoid any dangerous overlapping of membership between the various institutions. Thus when Andropov was appointed to the government post of KGB head, he was immediately dropped from the party secretariat; his promotion at the same time to candidate member of the politburo, however, broadened his access to all eleven full members. Finally, there is the maintenance of a balance of power among individuals at all the levels of the party and government. For instance, the influence of Brezhnev's associate, Kuleba, in the party secretariat is balanced by the presence of Suslov. Again, there are two first deputy premiers, Polyansky and Mazurov, both of whom are associated with rival political and regional groupings.

In fact, the system appears to have worked almost too well. There have been no alterations in the composition of the politburo since the last congress, suggesting that the delicate balance of power has made it exceedingly difficult for the leadership to make any change in its own membership. Even the most routine change might endanger this balance. Thus several members of the politburo who appear due for retirement because of advanced age or poor health may be held in office because of problems in replacing them. At the very least the congress should make a decision

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concerning the ambiguous status of Suslov and Kirilenko, Suslov was given protocol ranking as the secretary second to Brezhnev at the last party congress, but since then Kirilenko has gradually taken on most of the responsibilities as Brezhnev's second-in-command.

It would appear, however, that there will be no significant personnel actions or shift in the present balance of the leadership's power. This being the case, Brezhnev will have to continue to search for the middle ground and to work for compromises among the same factions and groupings that presently exist. While Shelepin, his principal rival in the past, has lost considerable ground politically, many Soviet officials still see him as potentially the strongest leader. Shelepin has now apparently joined with others in pressing Brezhnev to adopt more flexible, innovative policies. Brezhnev in the future must either get rid of him or pay heed to his views.

The seeming stalemate in the leadership is symbolized by the ambiguous status of Stalin's image. Since the 1965 "rehabilitation" of his

record as the man who led the Soviet Union to victory in World War II, there have been various low-key attempts to broaden this to include other facets of his career. Both his collectivization of agriculture and his industrialization program of the 1930s have been branded "successes" and declared off-limits to criticism. These "successes" are usually credited to the party and not to Stalin by name. It has not been possible, however, to erase from Soviet memories Khrushchev's revelations of the bloodshed and injustice that were the price for these achievements. The excesses of collectivization and the bloodshed of the Great Purge apparently has proved too difficult to treat publicly, and the long version of the official party history published this winter simply skipped the years from 1930 to 1937.

In the past, Soviet liberals used Stalin's "mistakes" as arguments for change. Conservatives now would like to use his "successes"- and Khrushchev's "mistakes"-as arguments against change. The two main participants at the 24th party congress may be the shades of Stalin and Khrushchev, engaged in a struggle for the soul of the congress.

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